

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 295

JC 790 475

AUTHOR Ryan, Monnie  
TITLE The Mature Woman in Higher Education: What's a Nice Old Girl like You Doing in a Place Like This?  
PUB DATE 16 Aug 79  
NOTE 35p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; Adult Education; Counseling; \*Females; Financial Support; Married Students; \*Nontraditional Students; \*Postsecondary Education; \*Student Needs; Student Personnel Services; \*Student Problems; Student School Relationship; \*Womens Education

IDENTIFIERS \*Reentry (Education)

## ABSTRACT

Mature women are returning to colleges and universities in ever-increasing numbers. These women have special goals and special needs and it is essential that institutions of higher education respond to these needs. The problems faced by the older woman student are numerous and may be characterized as either institutional or personal. Institutional problems include: the availability of accurate program information; financial aid restrictions; lack of counseling and support services and of child care; rigid class scheduling; and failure to receive credit for earlier education and various life experiences. Personal problems involve fear of academic competition; insecurity about learning ability; guilt that results from conflicting home and school demands; and lack of spousal support, either financial or emotional. Institutions of higher education can respond to these problems by offering formal orientation programs and peer support organizations; financial aid for part-time students; and flexible and non-traditional class formats, utilizing evening classes, televised instruction, and satellite and mobile campuses. Personal and career counseling services should be provided by staff members trained to understand the needs of mature women re-entry students. (DR)

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made \*  
\* from the original document. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

ED174295

THE MATURE WOMAN IN HIGHER EDUCATION: WHAT'S A NICE OLD  
GIRL LIKE YOU DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?

by

Monnie Ryan  
Kent State University  
Trumbull Campus  
Warren, Ohio

August 16, 1979

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS  
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Monnie Ryan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,  
EDUCATION & WELFARE  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF  
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO-  
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM  
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN-  
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS  
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT  
OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF  
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

JC 790 475

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                            | <u>Page No.</u> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| INTRODUCTION. . . . .                                                                      | 1               |
| WHY ARE THEY HERE?. . . . .                                                                | 3               |
| PROBLEMS OF MATURE WOMEN COLLEGE STUDENTS . . . . .                                        | 5               |
| Institutional Problems . . . . .                                                           | 5               |
| On- and Off-Campus Orientation Programs. . . . .                                           | 6               |
| Relevant Admission Standards . . . . .                                                     | 8               |
| Financial Aid. . . . .                                                                     | 9               |
| Credit for Life Experiences. . . . .                                                       | 11              |
| Credit for Earlier Education and<br>Acceptance of Credit From Other Institutions . . . . . | 13              |
| Class Scheduling . . . . .                                                                 | 14              |
| Career Counseling. . . . .                                                                 | 15              |
| Child Care . . . . .                                                                       | 17              |
| Personal Counseling and Faculty/Peer<br>Support Groups . . . . .                           | 18              |
| Special Programs and/or Courses of Study . . . . .                                         | 20              |
| Personal Problems. . . . .                                                                 | 25              |
| Competition/Inability to Learn . . . . .                                                   | 25              |
| The "Sore-Thumb" Complex . . . . .                                                         | 26              |
| Guilt--Husband, Home, Family . . . . .                                                     | 26              |
| The "I'm Not Worth It" Complex . . . . .                                                   | 27              |
| Spouse Disapproval. . . . .                                                                | 28              |
| Time Constraints . . . . .                                                                 | 29              |
| CONCLUSIONS . . . . .                                                                      | 29              |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .                                                                      | 31              |

THE MATURE WOMAN IN HIGHER EDUCATION: WHAT'S A NICE OLD GIRL  
LIKE YOU DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a significant increase in the number of students beyond the usual twenty-two years of age has been observed by colleges and universities throughout the United States. The percentage of these adults, generally termed "nontraditional" students, is now the fastest-growing segment in higher education and makes up 48 percent of the total enrollment of ten million. Additionally, an astounding 240 percent increase in part-time student enrollment is expected through 1985, with the vast majority of these students being adults. The total United States population over the age of twenty-five enrolled in degree programs increased from 29.3 percent in 1967 to 48.3 percent in 1972.

Concurrent with this trend is the sometimes dramatic decrease in the number of traditional-age students entering institutions of higher education immediately after high school. Forecasts of the demand for full-time higher education generally predict zero growth over the next ten to fifteen years. This decrease is due in part to the fact that since 1970, the school-age population ages 5-17 dropped by 3.5 million; a complete reversal of the 1950s and 1960s when the number grew to as much as 13 million. This drop has been especially evident in the North, where the average drop rate was 1.5 percent a year, or three times that of the South and West. There is a total of 5.5 million fewer children under the age of 17 today than in 1970.

An additional factor affecting the eighteen-year-old student population is that many young people today take a rather parochial view of existing economic conditions. They may ignore predictions by "experts" of increased lifetime earning potentials of college graduates as compared with those of high-school-only graduates. Instead, they consider the number of people holding masters degrees who work assembly lines in industries; the number of frustrated Ph.D.s teaching in junior high schools; and the number of college graduates who have no jobs at all. They conclude that it is not necessary for them to spend four years in college to "learn" to be unemployed.

What does all this mean to the future of higher education? Simply stated, it means that many institutions are faced with the unpleasant prospect of tightening their budgets almost to the point of strangulation, or even closing their doors, unless they are able to attract a greater student population in the very near future. Faced with the plain fact that there are, and will continue to be, only so many traditional-age students to go around, more and more colleges and universities are looking elsewhere to find qualified and interested students to fill their classrooms. Accordingly, the United States Commissioner of Education, Ernest L. Boyer, in a recent discussion of the plight of higher education today, stated that:

One kind of institution that will 'make it' is one that accommodates to shifts and goes out and finds their own new populations. They will create new arrangements, more flexible time, and even new kinds of programs that adjust to new student interests (Warren Tribune Chronicle).

Since women constitute the majority of this increased nontraditional student enrollment, many institutions of higher education, perhaps by forced farsightedness, have discovered the benefits of directing recruiting efforts toward mature women. And, in turn, the women are responding to those efforts.

Why are so many women turning to, or returning to, college? What, if any, needs are unique to this new and growing student population? And,

perhaps more importantly, how can institutions of higher education best meet these needs? The purpose of this paper is to explore these and other questions of concern to both the institutions and the increasing numbers of mature women who will be looking to the institutions for the answers.

#### WHY ARE THEY HERE?

It would be preposterously naive to suggest that a B.A. can be made as attractive to girls as a marriage license (Morgan, p. 35).

Dr. Grayson Kirk, former President of Columbia University, obviously hadn't dealt with today's women when he made the above statement. Though it has been found that even when other conditions favor higher education for women, marriage and motherhood will have a significant negative influence on the probability that women will exercise their right to an equal education, it is true that women are increasingly delaying marriage or deciding not to marry at all. Furthermore, the number of children they are having or want to have is declining; and more of those who do marry are remaining in school.

Basically, mature women are choosing the option of becoming college students for three primary reasons: they want or need to prepare for new careers; they want or need to update old career skills; or they are interested in exploring options for their futures or experiencing personal growth.

In 1978, 37 million women worked outside their homes, with median earnings of only \$6,540 per year. Two-thirds of these working women were supporting themselves or contributing to the support of children or other dependents; and 22 percent had husbands whose annual incomes were below the \$9,400 government minimum needed to support a family of four. Statistics also indicate that one woman in ten will be widowed by age fifty, and three marriages in ten will end in divorce. These factors, coupled with the

ever-increasing cost of living, make it quite obvious that a great number of women are and will be joining the labor force simply out of economic necessity. Many of them have only previously-learned career skills that are now hopelessly out of date, and many have no skills at all. Still others are seeking a new or better career in response to a general societal need or desire for better jobs, higher social status, and/or a secure future for their children.

An additional factor contributing to the dramatic increase in the number of older women entering college is the general influence of the women's movement. An anonymous quote in the introductory pages of Opportunities for Women in Higher Education seems to be an appropos summation of this influence:

The second most fundamental revolution in the affairs of mankind on earth is now occurring. The first came when man settled down from hunting, fishing, herding and gathering to sedentary agriculture and village life. The second is now occurring as women, no longer so concentrated on and sheltered for their child-bearing and child-rearing functions, are demanding equality of treatment in all aspects of life, are demanding a new sense of purpose (1973, p. iii).

This resultant self-awareness heretofore inexperienced by many women has created a realization that they have a right to explore and live up to their individual potentialities. They are searching for constructive and meaningful ways to spend their leisure hours at a time in which women caught watching the "boob tube" and being "just" a housewife and mother risk social disapproval. There is also a growing recognition among women that they can make important contributions to society as well as to their families.

Women are beginning to realize that new knowledge can be an important factor in economic and social growth; in fact, that knowledge may be the most powerful single element in our culture. Because the "invisible"

product of institutions of higher education is knowledge, it is not too surprising that more and more women are discovering and seeking to experience both the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits that a college education can provide.

Although there appear to be three major influences under which women seek a college education, the specific motivations of these women can number as many as there are women themselves. Therefore, it becomes important to focus on the sometimes unique problems these women may face as they embark on their journey through the hallowed halls of academe.

#### PROBLEMS OF MATURE WOMEN COLLEGE STUDENTS

The problems faced by the older woman student fall into two major categories: institutional, and personal. The two categories (as well as the subdivisions thereof) are necessarily interrelated; but for the purposes of this paper, the two will be considered separately. The suggestions for improvement presented by no means represent all the possibilities--they merely reflect what has been or is being done by some institutions of higher education.

##### Institutional Problems

In light of the current enrollment trends, it seems inconsistent that colleges and universities would put roadblocks in the way of the older woman who wants to go to school; but the fact is that many of them do. A study conducted by Rutgers University on the types of information sought by part-time adult students found that 63 percent wanted information on the type of programs offered; 52 percent wanted class schedule and tuition costs; 50 percent wanted to learn about entrance requirements. When the same students were asked what they perceived to be the biggest barrier to

college entry, 23 percent cited class scheduling; 10 percent listed tuition costs; and 9 percent believed entrance exams were a problem. In 15 percent of the cases, these reasons were believed to be severe enough to make the respondents postpone their initial application (Gallay, p. 16).

Accordingly, Carol Swallow, et al., have identified nine special institutional needs of the older woman:

1. On- and Off-Campus Orientation Programs
2. Relevant Admissions Standards
3. Financial Aid
4. Credit for Life Experiences
5. Credit for Earlier Education/Acceptance of Credit from Other Institutions
6. Career Counseling
7. Class Scheduling
8. Child Care
9. Faculty/Peer Support and Counseling (1975, p. 580)

A tenth item, the need for special programs and/or courses of study, should also be included.

#### On- And Off-Campus Orientation Programs

Communication on the part of institutions is vital in helping women make the initial decision to enroll. In fact, perhaps the first problem a woman faces when she considers going to school is simple ignorance of how to go about doing so. In a 1966 study of the preferences of college choice of older students, it was found that 44 percent of the respondents preferred a college less than ten miles from their homes; 41 percent wanted a maximum tuition of \$500 or less; 60 percent preferred a college size of 1,000-5,000 students; and 40 percent preferred public schools, either four-year or two-

year (Munday, p. 683). Before a woman takes that first step, therefore, it is important that she know what institutions exist, where they are located, and whether or not she will be welcomed within its walls. She needs suggestions of possibilities and to know that she is not alone or peculiar in her desire to further her education. She needs to know that others have tried, are trying, or want to try.

An important aspect in successfully orienting the older woman to college "life" involves a process Mezirow labels "perspective transformation" (1978, p. 17). Basically, perspective transformation is the process by which adult women come to recognize culturally-induced dependency roles and relationships and take action to overcome them. Many women become capable of articulating their feelings of discontent through exposure to the rapidly changing social norms relating to their potentialities for self-fulfillment. However, the complete transformation process requires not only this self-examination, but also exploring the options for new ways of living and making provisional efforts to try out new roles. In addition, the process involves planning a course of action, acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing the plans, and finally a reintegration into society with a newfound, inner-directed stance (Mezirow, pp. 7-8).

Institutions must therefore make concerted efforts to not only attract the mature woman but also provide as much information as possible. Personal contact with women's organizations, informative brochures, and other media publicity all are effective in informing women in the college community of the opportunities available at the campus. Once the woman enrolls, special orientation programs are helpful which make the transition from "outside world" to the academic environment as painless as possible. The older woman needs reinforcement to reassure herself of her abilities and remove anxieties. She may need "buffering"--easing of the fright of real or imagined hurdles.

To help in the transformation process, she may need help in recognizing herself as the center of her own life and in choosing among the options available those that best fulfill that centered self--processes Nina and George O'Neill term "Centering" and "Focusing" (1974, pp. 129-137). This may be accomplished by offering special orientation and self-awareness courses staffed by trained instructors. Regular students may be assigned on a "buddy" system to show the older students around and serve as resource persons.

#### Relevant Admission Standards

Most four-year institutions use the same criteria to evaluate both adult and high-school age applicants for admission. Unfortunately, traditional admissions criteria may be misleading or even completely irrelevant for evaluating the older student. High school GPAs of adult students are, of course, outdated; and tests such as the ACT and SAT are constructed to evaluate the traditional characteristics of the 18-21 year-old only. At Macomb County Community College in Michigan, the relationship of ACT and high school GPAs to college GPAs was studied, and the correlation found was not high enough to warrant use of the high school scores as exclusive criteria for prediction of the success of adult applicants. At Riverside City College, California, it was found that while mature students had some of the poorest results on the College Qualification Test, the college GPAs were higher than the younger students who scored higher on the test. It is evident that, in general, as age increases, the use of the high school GPA as a predictor of academic success in college becomes less reliable (Reed & Murphy, pp. 130-131).

It therefore becomes obvious that some other criteria must be used to evaluate adult students who apply for college admission, and some modification, or "reflooring," or requirements making older women eligible for entrance

should be effected. This might be accomplished by a special group arrangement with the Office of Admissions and Registration. If standards are rigid for all full-time students, women might circumvent them by enrolling initially as part-time students. This reflooring may also be extended to the classroom by the elimination of grades, written assignments focusing on personal experiences, and/or allowing students who become extremely anxious during an exam to stop in the middle and resume the next day. Some institutions are now granting "Index Amnesty" for all students over the age of twenty-one--they are admitted sans entrance exams and regardless of their high school GPAs or ACT scores. If entrance exams are given at all, they should only serve as baseline measurements in subjects such as English or mathematics which can be used to insure proper class placement for the students.

#### Financial Aid

While some financial aid opportunities do exist for the mature student through grants, loans, and scholarships, many of these opportunities are not applicable to all. For example, many grants are available only to full-time students, although there may be no age limitation. Since most adult students attend school on a part-time basis, they are automatically excluded from receiving this aid. In addition, almost all grants and loans and most scholarships are based on total family income. This presents a problem for the older woman who wants, or needs, to pay her own way through school. Some husbands may take the approach of "Fine; if you can find a way to pay for it, you can go"--but when his income must be included in the consideration, the wife may find she is ineligible for financial aid when without his salary she would have qualified. The Insured Student Loan Program is also inadequate in that it presents difficulty in repayment arrangements for a married woman. She may be unable, perhaps due to family responsibilities, to begin repaying the loan immediately after her graduation.

First of all, it is important that financial aid opportunities be extended to include part-time students. It has also been suggested that the Insured Student Loan Program adopt a variable repayment period ranging from twenty to thirty years. The initial payment would not be due until two years after earning a degree, and repayment could be deferred during any period in which the income of the borrower falls below a certain minimum subsistence level. One recommendation of the Carnegie Commission is that after high school graduation, every person in the United States should have two years of postsecondary education put "in the bank" for them to use at any time during their lifetimes (Kerr, p. 87).

Another suggestion, though perhaps a bit radical, involves the establishment of a "Mothers' Bill for Educational Opportunity" similar to the G.I. Bill. Veterans are given this type of assistance because the youth have "guaranteed" the survival of this country and its citizens, often at considerable sacrifice. In a different but equally real sense, women who are mothers have guaranteed the survival of this country; and they should be rewarded rather than penalized for this contribution.

Other institutions are developing novel plans whereby the older student can receive tuition benefits. One such university offers spouse tuition benefits, wherein the husband and wife may enroll in the same course with one paying full price while the other receives a substantial discount. In a similar arrangement at another institution, the spouse of a full-time student can take one class of his or her choice per semester for only \$5. Another school offers a "half-price" sale in an effort to introduce older students to college life without its pressures. The student may sit in on any university class (for no credit) at half the regular tuition. Yet another unorthodox approach is the "money'back" guarantee. If the student passes

the course, the college keeps the tuition. However, if the student attends class regularly, prepares all the assignments, and asks for extra help from the instructor and still does not pass, the tuition is refunded.

One type of financial aid is fast being offered by institutions of higher education throughout the country. Senior citizens may be eligible for half to total tuition reductions. In most cases, men and women qualify if they are fifty-five years of age or older and retired (or not working, as in the case of housewives), or sixty-five and older regardless of employment status. The only restriction may be that class enrollment is on a standing-room-only basis--if the class fills up with regular "paying" customers, the senior citizens may be removed from the class.

#### Credit for Life Experiences

One major problem older women encounter is the reluctance of many institutions to admit that what people have learned is more relevant to formal academic recognition than where they learned it or how much time they spent on it. Many women who have gained "expertise" in one or more areas during their post-secondary high school years find that this knowledge is considered nonexistent simply because they did not acquire it in a formal learning situation. The secretary who has successfully passed a Certified Professional Secretary examination; the woman who has worked in an accounting firm for fifteen years; the woman who ran for public office or who worked diligently in many an election campaign; and the woman who has cared for the children of others to make extra spending money for her family all are in danger of having their expertise totally unacknowledged.

Fortunately, this situation is beginning to change, albeit slowly. In general, the acceptance of credit based on past living or working conditions can be included under the rubric of "credit for life experiences." Institutions

throughout the country are granting credit for varying amounts of study related to employment, specific interests, or volunteer commitments.

Three such programs have been developed on a national level. The College Level Examination Program (CLEP) was initiated in the mid-60s to evaluate what people have learned through independent study. CLEP tests are available in forty-two diverse subjects; and in 1974, 99,688 people took one or more of them. The Cooperative Assessment of Experimental Learning (CAEL) is a joint effort of the Educational Testing Service and 160 institutions of higher education. This cooperative attempts to assess academic relevance of "experiential" learning, or learning acquired through experience rather than books. The Director of the project at the time, Warren Willingham, has said: "Thirty-year olds aren't eighteen-year olds. They have done a variety of things in their lives. In the process of work, travel, or volunteer experiences, they have learned much that has real academic merit" ("There's More," pp. 3-4). A third assessment program, the General Educational Development (GED), also provides tests in various subject areas and operates centers where students can take the tests.

In 1974, the American Council on Education and the New York State Board of Regents formed the Project on Noncollegiate-Sponsored Instruction. This program is an assessment technique for courses and programs offered by institutions whose primary purpose is not education. Business, labor unions, professional organizations and government as well as cultural organizations such as museums and botanical gardens provide an array of educational courses which involve 32 million Americans.

In general, colleges must encourage people over a wide range of ages to take advantage of greater access to postsecondary education. These opportunities should enable people to obtain higher education at any time throughout

their lifetimes. The motivational factor for students who are allowed and encouraged to avail themselves of credit earned for life experiences is enormous--they will be much more likely to enroll in a degree program when they see a way to cut a year or so from the conventional two- or four-year program. It is also true that granting such credit is a real money-saver; one year in college with an average of ten courses costs anywhere from \$2,000 to \$6,000, whereas the CLEP tests, for example, cost from \$20 for one to \$40 for five. The student's total cost of education is less prohibitive, and the institution saves the cost of providing "repetitive" education simply to fulfill a formal requirement.

#### Credit for Earlier Education and Acceptance of Credit from Other Institutions

Many institutions discourage adult students by refusing to accept credits earned years before from the same institution; many more refuse to accept credit earned earlier from other institutions. In both instances, the older woman may be discouraged from re-enrolling later in life because she may literally have to begin all over again. The refusal of institutions to accept credit earned elsewhere also creates a problem for the wife who has had to move with her husband's work and has found it necessary to study at several colleges before completing a degree.

There is a need for a greater flexibility in the acceptance of transfer credit as well as credit earned in past years. While there are necessarily differences in courses offered from institution to institution and course content can change over a period of years, some type of standard procedure for acceptance of credits should be adopted. Some institutions are helping to solve this problem by the formation of exchanges, or "consortiums," wherein several institutions band together to offer students the widest possible variety of course offerings; credit can be transferred freely among

participating institutions. Some consortiums do not require students to become residents students at any one campus in order to acquire a degree. Others provide free transportation among participating schools to classes and offer tuition-free classes on the other campuses for students enrolled as resident students on another member campus.

Additionally, universities should ideally be able to certify that mature students with out-of-date degrees have completed a course of study which effectively updates their knowledge of their field and gives their credentials authenticity.

### Class Scheduling

One of the most frequently-cited problems of older women students is the time that classes are scheduled. Most older women students also have family responsibilities that require their presence at home during certain hours. This is particularly true of women with school-age children. Therefore, it becomes necessary for these students to be able to take classes primarily during public-school hours. Related to this is the fact that some institutions are reluctant to admit students on a part-time basis, thereby making it all but impossible for a young mother or woman who must work to support herself and pay for her education to enroll. Sometimes, campus administrators and instructors hold the attitude that part-time programs are only good as a source of personal or institutional income and denounce the attempts of people who work all day and try to gain an education on a part-time basis as academically unsound. Many graduate programs, for example, actively discourage the admission of students who wish to study on a part-time basis. Given a choice between an older woman planning to study part-time and a student who plans to study full-time, many such departments are likely to favor the full-time student. These departments may also insist that the graduate degree be

earned within a limited number of years, which makes it difficult for a woman whose family responsibilities necessitate her studying part-time.

There are several methods of solving the problem of class scheduling. One is to hold classes primarily between the hours of 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. so as to interfere as little as possible with family schedules. Duplicate classes may be offered in the evening (with child care facilities hopefully provided in both cases) for those women who must work all day. This is generally termed class "blocking," and it offers the extra advantage of enabling the older women to share classes, thereby creating a built-in support group. At the graduate level, it is important that women who must study on a part-time basis receive equal consideration for acceptance in the programs. Time limitations for the earning of a graduate degree should be extended for these students.

#### Career Counseling

Education is inextricably involved in the quality of any nation. Over the past thirty years, nearly half of the United States' national growth can be explained by the greater education of our people and by better technology, which is also largely a product of the educational system.

Although more and more women are entering the labor force each year, many of them will face frustration and disappointment because the opportunities for challenging and creative jobs for women, which also traditionally bring rewards of status and a high level of remuneration, remain limited. The university system is central to any alteration of this, because it has a virtual monopoly on the field of professional and higher occupational training. Although it is possible in theory to acquire the knowledge and skills required to learn a profession without attending a university, in practice all of the professions, and most "higher" occupations, require some kind of university

certification. It is simply not possible in our society to "work your way up" from nurse to doctor or from dental assistant to dentist.

An old cliché states that education is not preparation for earning a living, but preparation for life--implying that it is possible to separate the two. For most people today, women included, work is a dominant life interest; and a theory of education which ignores that fact appears to be something less than liberal. Through occupational training and retraining, through counseling, guidance, and relocation, students should be assisted to acquire skills valuable in a dynamic economy where skill levels are rising at perhaps the fastest rate in history. Unfortunately, in the case of the older woman student, this career counseling too often is limited in scope, unrealistic, or even nonexistent.

These older students should first of all receive accurate information on whether or not they should go to college at all. They are normally told that it is difficult to get a job without a college education, when in fact 80 percent of the jobs in the nation do not require such an education. They are told that degrees are essential for financial success, when in fact 68 percent of the adults in the upper-income brackets reached that position without college degrees.

It is therefore important that counseling programs dealing with career advising are realistic. This involves "grounding," which is helping women to assess their opportunities in the light of hard realities and to plan accordingly. It does nothing for the morale of an entering or re-entering woman to be encouraged and given career advice only to find that there are no jobs available for her. However, women need to realize that the self-confidence which is acquired through success can be beneficial in itself, and the receiving of a degree or certificate may be valued by the woman herself as proof of her ability to "make it" in a new world. Colleges and

universities should therefore emphasize personal rewards obtainable as well as the pragmatic aspects of educational programs when advising and counseling.

Many of the traditional barriers to women entering the establishment are disappearing. The United States Department of Labor Statistics lists women among the work force in every occupation that the agency lists (Swallow, p. 579). Many women, however, because of the low status accorded the "housewife" in our society, are likely to believe they have no talents that are marketable or which can be turned into a "real" career. Because man has been the usual vocational breadwinner, educational guidance research and practices have largely been developed from a masculine point of view. Therefore, a great need exists for the training of career counselors so that they are able to provide realistic guidance for the problems arising out of the particular roles of women in our present culture. To this end, guidance research should undertake the development of diagnostic devices specifically designed for adult women, particularly those possessing no visible formal career skills, and an effort should be made to recruit and train middle-aged women as career counselors.

#### Child Care

One of the most crucial aspects of the college support system is quality, low-cost child care. Funding problems generally make this service difficult to provide, but women with pre-school children (or those who wish to attend school in the summer) may find it almost impossible to enroll unless they are fortunate enough to have a kindly relative with whom to leave the children. Also, the additional cost of a babysitter may make the cost of a woman's education even more prohibitive.

Since quality child care is so important, it seems expedient for institutions to look into some type of government funding or to include funds for this service somewhere in their budgets. However, another alternative might be to staff child care centers on some type of rotating basis using mothers as staff.

#### Personal Counseling and Faculty/Peer Support Groups

Helen Astin reports that the results of a 1976 study of older students indicated that the encouragement of counselors and other supportive people at the time of the students' decision to enroll was crucial. In fact, the more personal the counseling, the more effective it was (1976, p. 94). Yet it remains that counseling is the most under-researched component of nontraditional study; and all too often, little or no support is offered mature women, particularly those enrolled in programs of a nontraditional nature. Sometimes this lack of support is a direct result of the administrative and faculty skepticism surrounding nontraditional education. Administrators may worry that credit earned through nontraditional means may further cut already-dwindling enrollments, even though this has been disproved. Faculty may view "women's courses" a bit disparagingly and have the opinion that the courses are simply a passing interest which should not occupy the time of any serious student. Obviously, a degree earned through a nontraditional program will not be worth much to anyone if it is regarded as a second-class credential.

Sadly lacking in most institutions of higher education are female role models. Women need to learn to take the work of other women seriously. The presence of a powerful model--a woman who has great intelligence, accomplishment, and charismatic appeal--can give other women the courage to develop their own capacities. For example, in a study of twenty-seven important texts

used in college history courses, it was found that no book devoted more than 2 percent of its pages to women (Vickers, p. 45). In addition, in 1978, only 13.5 percent of full-time university faculty members in both public and private institutions were women (Reed, p. 125). Women students are generally not adequately represented in student leadership positions and occupy very few elected positions of power.

In dealing with the problems of the older women students, it is necessary to select teachers and other personnel who are sympathetic to the problems of these women. They must be willing to individualize each woman's relationship to their program to counteract the oftentimes bureaucratic aspects of the college or university. In the classroom, it is important that both traditional and nontraditional subject matter be taught from the woman's perspective in the sense of self-examination, departure from past norms, and the recognition of expanding options. This may also include the instructors' taking extra precautions to clearly spell out assignments and material expected for examination or term papers or by offering programs emphasizing remedial work from the beginning in core courses, with group study encouraged.

Many women need "cushioning" against taking risks early in their programs while being simultaneously weaned away from overreliance on others. Personal counseling, whether by peer counselors working for academic credit, volunteers, students paid through Work/Study funds, or professionals, should be trained in the special problems inherent to the older woman student. It is a plus if these staff members are themselves former re-entry students, since they are personally familiar with the problems that will be encountered by the incoming women and also tend to be enthusiastic about sharing the benefits they themselves have gained. These counselors should be able to diagnose intellectual potential, evaluate prior education, and review work

experience with an eye to subsequent counseling as to the next steps in education and/or career for each individual counselee. The counselors should also be trained to discard outmoded concepts of male and female careers and to encourage women in their own abilities and aspirations. The students should come, through counseling, to understand and develop a commitment to the idea that education must be a continuing process and that there are rewards and satisfactions, both personal and monetary, in continuing this education.

The establishment of a physically separate women's center can be an asset to the overall entry program; though in practice, such a center is extremely unusual. The center is valuable as a drop-in counseling center; a social hub; a study room; a locus of group identity; an information referral center; and, in general, a source of the informal support necessary to unify participants and ensure their success in the college environment. Peer support groups, perhaps with "headquarters" in the women's center, are helpful in the transition process of incoming students.

#### Special Programs and/or Courses of Study

Types of programs available is a major area of concern to the older woman student. The Rutgers study referred to previously also surveyed the adult students' reasons for applying to college. Professional growth (other than increased salary) was cited in 78 percent of the cases; 75 percent cited long-range economic security; 68 percent mentioned increased salary; and increased self-esteem was given as a reason in 64 percent of the cases. (Note: The study sample contained both men and women, but an analysis of the demographic factors found that the priorities of the men and women were virtually identical (Gallay, p. 14).

The peculiar life cycles of women, the multiple roles which they must play in modern society, and their needs for self-fulfillment, both intellectually and professionally, may require special kinds of education. Too often, these needs are ignored and no educational opportunities exist other than the pursuit of an academic degree in the traditional manner. A 1976 study of goal preferences of older students revealed that 45 percent were ultimately seeking bachelors' degrees and 27 percent the two-year degree (Munday, p. 684). Some provisions should therefore be made for the remaining 28 percent who are not necessarily interested in earning a college degree but who want to avail themselves of some type of formal post-secondary education.

The most common form of nontraditional education for older students falls under the heading of "continuing education." These courses are usually offered on a non-credit basis and may include such diverse subjects as car care, landscaping, interior design, and real estate. They may also include personal direction-finding courses, social sciences and humanities courses concerned with women's issues, "how-to" courses such as resume writing or financial management, and enrichment-recreation courses such as crafts and Yoga. The courses may be designed to prepare students for careers or simply for personal knowledge. Many such courses earn CEUs, or Continuing Education Units, with one unit representing ten hours of non-credit instruction. In some cases, the CEUs earned may be transferred to credit at a later time, but these opportunities are severely limited. The cost-per-class is usually less than for regular credit classes.

Many nontraditional educational opportunities are also beginning to appear which are of great value to the older woman student who is interested in earning college credit, though not necessarily in pursuance of a degree.

Probably the oldest form of this type of education is correspondence courses. Lessons are mailed to the student, who is free to study at home and return the completed assignments to the institution via mail. Examinations are generally arranged under the supervision of a neighborhood public-school official. However, to date, it is not possible to earn a degree from any accredited college or university in the United States by correspondence alone. At some point, the student must attend classes on a campus. Also, many institutions place limitations on the total number of credits that may be earned by correspondence.

Another nontraditional method of earning college credit which is fast gaining in popularity is the weekend college. Under this arrangements, classes are held on the weekends only, which makes it easier for a woman with small children or who holds a full-time job to go to school. The study is necessarily intense, but assignments can be completed at the student's own pace during the week.

Other nontraditional approaches to higher education include the following:

1. TV Courses. This type of arrangement is usually coordinated with a public TV station, with the student watching the show or shows and completing written assignments and perhaps supplemental reading. There may also be a few group meetings on campus during the course of the quarter or semester.
2. Telephone Courses. Under this system, a telephone hookup is made from the student's home to the university classroom. By dialing the appropriate number, the student may listen in on what takes place in the classroom and even participate in class discussion.
3. Home Reading. These courses are usually offered in cooperation with a local library, and credit is earned by reading assigned books in a variety of subject areas and completing assignments or reports.

4. Classrooms on Wheels. This innovative concept was designed to utilize the time spent commuting to jobs, etc. In conjunction with a local college or university, railroads use TV to provide classes which are taken during the students' ride to and/or from work. Some assignments may be required.

5. Self-Paced Learning. The student does not attend lectures in a classroom under this type of arrangement. Sound/slide programs are available which permit students to work and learn at their own best rate of speed for each individual class.

6. Module Scheduling. This type of education differs from the others in that it is possible to earn a degree using the method. There are no "major" or "minor" fields of study; rather, students "contract" to do some type of work such as internships, seminars, or travel-study, for a specific time period ranging from three to twelve weeks (called "modules"). After the student has completed sixteen such modules of varying lengths, he or she earns a B.A.

Two other special education programs that have been developed by specific institutions are worthy of note in that they provide opportunities for older women in particular. In 1971 in England, the Open University was established with an initial enrollment of 25,000 and projected 1976 enrollment of 100,000. The University utilizes BBC programs, correspondence packages, and 3,000 part-time tutors and counselors at 250 study centers throughout the country. At present, enrollment is limited to students over the age of twenty-one, and the cost is about one-third of the conventional campus education (Martin, p. 100).

In Brooklyn, New York, the National Congress of Neighborhood Women (NCNW) was established. This is an accredited, tuition-free junior college for neighborhood women who are concerned about jobs and education but who are also

interested in getting an education which will help them "give something back to their community." Accordingly, economics students, for example, study the New York City budget cuts to see how they will affect the neighborhood. One unique feature of this institution is their "buddy system" which will mobilize at literally a moment's notice to give sisterly support to those students in need of help (Van Gelder, pp. 57-58).

A final area which needs to be mentioned in relation to the older woman student is developmental education. This may be defined as that education which upgrades the basic skills of persons who are socially or educationally disadvantaged--students who may not already possess the skills necessary to successfully pursue higher education. This type of education should be directed toward providing the student with those skills that are needed to pursue a college degree, and it may be accomplished through a variety of means. One way is through remedial or refresher courses, particularly in subjects such as English, mathematics, or study skills. In some cases, students over twenty-five may attend credit classes on an audit basis with special audit fees. After three years of auditing, the students may enroll as regular credit students, and credits earned by audit are applied toward the baccalaureate degree program. Deferred-degree programs, which are reduced-load academic programs consisting of evening-session freshman-level courses, are offered at some institutions. After the student completes a prescribed number of credit-hours with specific grades, he or she will be accepted in a degree program and granted appropriate advanced standing on the basis of the courses already completed.

Some institutions hold special "re-entry" classes for incoming mature women, which may consist of a three-class series which is required before the students are mainstreamed into the regular credit classes. One of the classes may deal with communication skills designed to aid women in reading faster and

better and writing more effectively; one course may be a counseling services class which helps the students explore educational curricula and vocations open to them; and the third may be a liberal arts course of each woman's choice.

#### PERSONAL PROBLEMS

The support groups and counselors discussed in the previous section can be invaluable in helping women deal with the personal problems they may experience. Though peer counselors are generally intimately and acutely aware of these problems, it may be necessary to alert professional counselors to the fact that many of the problems can, and most probably will, be experienced by the incoming older women. They must learn that the problems are very real, and many times will be more difficult for the student to deal with than those of an institutional nature.

#### Competition/Inability to Learn

It is natural for the older woman to feel she will not be able to compete with eighteen-year olds who have just come from a similarly structured educational environment. The incoming older woman may also be afraid that she has lost the capacity to learn after years of being away from school.

However, in neither case are her fears justified. Dr. Edward Thorndike conducted a study many years ago in which he compared both the speed of learning and the degree of achievement in groups of people ranging up to age fifty. He found that adults were superior to children in all the tasks studied. His conclusion was that no one should use the fear that he or she is too old to learn as an excuse for not learning--it appears that adulthood brings a deeper sense of purpose and provides a richer background of experiences to make learning meaningful (Beatley, pp. 72-73). Also, doctors

are now finding that diminishing capacities are caused simply by disuse rather than a fixed biological decline. While it is true that the number of brain cells each person has is set at birth, the quantity of certain other cells in the brain actually increases as the brain matures and continues to increase with experience and new skills the person acquires. Research also indicates that mature women respond to higher education with enthusiasm, ability, and a high sense of purpose. In general, their college performance surpasses even their own high school intellectual performance, as well as that of their younger counterparts. As a matter of fact, mature women are welcomed into many classes simply because they bring so much life experience and dedication to their work and raise the level of class discussion.

#### The "Sore-Thumb" Complex

Many older women fear that because they will be the only "old lady" in the classroom, they will stand out like a sore thumb. Other younger students will look askance at them, and they may feel isolated because of the differences in ages. In reality, with enrollment trends bringing in more and more older students, it is highly unlikely that a woman would not find peers somewhere in her educational environment. This is one area in which peer support groups, class blocking, or sympathetic faculty members can be of invaluable assistance. If a woman simply sees another woman near her own age on campus, it can do wonders for her morale and help her more rapidly become comfortable in her new surroundings. Communication during recruiting is also of great importance--women should be made aware that others like her are already enrolled and will stand ready to help her if needed.

#### Guilt--Husband, Home, Family

Guilt is one of the most insidious problems encountered by the mature woman--and it has put an end to many a college career almost before it got

started. Many women feel that they are "abandoning" their homes and families to pursue a time consuming venture that is personally fulfilling. They may feel they are being selfish in taking the time that "rightfully" belongs to their husbands and children. They may also feel guilty in taking their family's money for an education, particularly if they themselves do not work outside their homes and contribute to educational costs. Unfortunately, this guilt can be sometimes initiated, and nearly always perpetuated, by the families themselves. Children "demand" help with their homework just as mother reaches for her textbook; as the wife studies frantically for an exam, her husband "casually" mentions that it has been a week since he lost the button off his favorite shirt. The result is that many women bend over backwards trying to make up for this "terrible" thing they are doing. They are then mentally torn between the guilt heaped upon them by their families and their desire to do something worthwhile for themselves, and they may physically wear themselves out attempting to overcompensate and assure their families that they will not suffer any hardships.

Again, counselors can be of assistance to these women by helping them understand and accept the fact that they should not have to "earn" the right to improve themselves. At the same time, the counselors can assist the women in learning to help their families become more understanding and supportive. It could even be beneficial for counselors to offer a class just for husbands to sensitize them to potential problems.

#### The "I'm Not Worth It" Complex

Partly because of the low status of the housewife and mother in our society, many women feel that they are not worth all the trouble they will cause their loved ones by becoming a college student. This is especially true if a woman is herself unsure of her goals. The woman may feel, in other

words, that unless she has a definite career goal in mind, she has no right to make the demands on her family that will necessarily result. It is important that counselors help women develop a positive self-image coupled with the knowledge that the intrinsic benefits derived from a college education can also be rewarding, both personally and from the standpoint that knowledge gained can in turn be passed on to those around them. Children of college-bound mothers, for example, will have an opportunity to gain first-hand insight into the value of education and the importance of working for something they want.

### Spouse Disapproval

The husband who objects to or disapproves of his wife's new status as a college student usually does so out of fear or jealousy. The fear may be that his wife will find the "real" world so appealing that she will decide to stay in it--without him. The jealousy may be because he himself has been experiencing frustration or dissatisfaction with his job and would also like to find a way out. In a last-ditch effort at chauvinism, he may be afraid his wife will surpass him intellectually or monetarily. The chances are that he is also used to seeing his wife in her "accustomed" roles; and, being aware that most of those roles also work to his benefit, he may be reluctant to have her give even one of them up.

Women need to learn ways of dealing with their husbands' very real fears. They may prefer to ease their way into college slowly, thereby diminishing the initial shock to both themselves and their husbands. It is helpful for them to share their problems with their husbands and discuss information learned in classes--to make them feel they have a part in the woman's newfound "life." Women might be encouraged to try to convince their husbands to enroll in college themselves, particularly if special opportunities for older men also exist at the campus.

### Time Constraints

Finding time to fit the demands of housework, family responsibilities, and studying into a 24-hour day is always difficult for the older woman. However, it is true that years spent with PTA meetings, short-order cooking, and running a limousine service have probably made them experts at juggling time effectively.

Women may primarily need help with developing good study skills, prioritizing their responsibilities, and in learning to delegate (or even eliminate) many of the chores they currently perform. With the latter two, peer counseling is very effective in that women can learn how other women have managed. Getting the most out of the least study time is a skill that should be learned by all students (though it rarely is!) A special class or tutorial service can be helpful in teaching which method of study is most conducive to which type of class.

### CONCLUSIONS

In light of the growing number of older women currently enrolling in institutions of higher education and the special problems of these students, it is obvious that much more can and should be done by the institutions to alleviate or eliminate these problems. Since one problems nearly always overlaps others, providing a solution to just one, while a start in the right direction, can only scratch the tip of the iceberg. It is necessary that institutions consider the total picture and make whatever adjustments are needed.

Constance Warren, former President of Sarah Lawrence College, sums up the general philosophy that institutions should adopt in order to provide the encouragement, support, and guidance necessary for the successful education of the older woman student:

Each student has within herself the seeds of what she is capable of becoming. The purpose of her college education is to enable her to develop those innate qualities and become emotionally and intellectually capable of coming to terms with whatever life may have in store for her. . . we must ask ourselves how to find what the individual needs to help her to understand herself, realize her own powers, and develop a sense of direction and purpose. . . this approach to education is individualized, adapted to different capacities, interests, and objectives of individual students. . . the curriculum must be flexible to serve individual needs, and cannot be considered an end in itself, or a straight jacket to fit all alike (Montagu, p. 242).

As far as abilities are concerned, both sexes should be afforded equal opportunities to realize their potentials and the judgment of their abilities should not be prejudiced by any bias of sex.

Or, it should be added, of age.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Astin, Helen. Some Action of Her Own. Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath & Company, 1976.
- Astin, Helen; and Kirsch, Werner, eds. The Higher Education of Women: Essays in Honor of Rosemary Park. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978.
- Bardwick, Judith; and Douvan, Elizabeth. "Ambivalence: The Socialization of Women." In Woman in Sexist Society. Edited by Vivian Gornick and Barbara Moran. New York: The New American Library, 1971.
- Beatley, Bancroft. Another Look at Women's Education. Boston: Simmons College, 1955.
- Blackwell, Gordon W. "The College and the Continuing Education of Women." Educational Record 44 (January 1963): 33-39.
- Equal Opportunity Forum, January 1979.
- Fitzpatrick, Blanche. Women's Inferior Education. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976.
- Gallay, Ralph; and Hunter, Ronald. "Why Adults Are Pursuing a Part-Time College Education." Collegiate News & Views XXXII (Winter 1978-79): 13-16.
- Harris, Janet. The Prime of Ms. America. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975.
- Kerr, Clark. "Higher Education in the United States in 1980-2000--From the Perspective of the Carnegie Commission." In Education. . . Beyond Tomorrow. Edited by Richard W. Hostrap. Homewood, Illinois: ETC Publications, 1975.
- Kerr, Clark. The Uses of the University. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Lewis, Edwin C. Developing Woman's Potential. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1968.
- Martin, Michael. "Space-Free/Time-Free Higher Learning: New Programs, New Institutions, and New Questions." In Education. . . Beyond Tomorrow. Edited by Richard W. Hostrap. Homewood, Illinois: ETC Publications, 1975.
- Mezirow, Jack. Education for Perspective Transformations: Women's Re-entry Programs in Community Colleges. New York: Center for Adult Education, Columbia University, 1978.
- Montagu, Ashley. The Natural Superiority of Women. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1974.

Morgan, Robin, ed. Sisterhood is Powerful. New York: Random House, 1970.

Munday, Leo A. "College Access for Nontraditional Students." Journal of Higher Education LXVII (November/December 1976): 681-700.

O'Neill, Nina; and O'Neill, George. Shifting Gears. New York: Avon Books, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. Opportunities for Women in Higher Education. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1973.

Packwood, William C., ed. College Student Personnel Services. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1977.

Reed, Jeffrey; and Murphy, Michael. "Academic Performance of Adults and Veterans." College & University 50 (Winter 1975): 129-143.

Ryan, Monnie. Whatcha Gonna Be When You Grow Up? Niles, Ohio. By the Author. 422 Brown Street, 1978.

Splaver, Sarah. Nontraditional College Routes to Careers. New York: Julian Messner, 1975.

Swallow, Carol, et al. "Special Admissions for Adult Women." College & University 50 (Summer 1975): 579-580.

\_\_\_\_\_. "There's More Than One Way to Earn a College Degree." Carnegie Quarterly XXII (Fall 1975): 1-8.

Van Gelder, Lindsay. "When the Edith Bunkers Unite!" MS VII (February 1979): 53-56.

Vickers, Jill; and Adam, June. But Can You Type? Canada: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1977.

Warren Tribune Chronicle. 14 January 1979.

Williams, Juanita H. Psychology of Women. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977.

Woodring, Paul. "Who Should Go to College?" In American Colleges: The Uncertain Future. Edited by William P. Lineberry. New York: N. W. Wilson Company, 1975.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.  
LOS ANGELES

AUG 31 1979

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR  
JUNIOR COLLEGES